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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MCAP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RU](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: CHAVEZ BUYS ARMS AND INVITES RUSSIAN NAVY

REF: A. CARACAS 422

[1](#)B. 07 CARACAS 2319

Classified By: Daniel Lawton, Acting Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
Communications Minister Andres Izarra on July 22 denied local
media reports that President Hugo Chavez offered to base
Russian troops at a military facility in Venezuela and that
Chavez' arms deal with Russia has swollen to almost USD 30
billion. The July 23 editions of local newspapers reported
Chavez repeating the claim that the FOURTH FLEET was
threatening Venezuela and destabilizing the region. Chavez
stated that cooperation with Russia guaranteed Venezuela's
security and predicted that visiting Russian Navy ships would
receive a warm welcome. The Russians are more likely to come
as trainers and technicians than combat troops. The quick
denial by Izarra yet another recent example of the BRV
"clarifying" and moderating Chavez' foreign policy
pronouncements. End Summary.

THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING?

[1](#)2. (SBU) BRV Communications Minister Andres Izarra called
into the July 22 broadcast of state-run political talk show
"La Hojilla" denying the Interfax news story that Venezuela's
arms purchases from Moscow had ballooned to USD 30 billion
and that Chavez offered basing rights to Russia. Calling the
private media outlets that carried the story
"ill-intentioned," Izarra explained the 30 billion figure was
totally false and that Chavez' statement on Russians in
Venezuela "was out of context."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Chavez told a reporter that the FOURTH FLEET was
"a threat, not just against Venezuela but against all Latin
America." The Venezuelan strongman explained that given the
Russian forces' mobility that it would not be "unusual" for
Russian ships to appear in Venezuelan ports. Chavez
predicted that the welcome for a Russian fleet would include
"banners, beating drums and singing songs."

SUPER SIZE ME

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Venezuelan nation-wide daily El Nacional
reported July 23 that Chavez justified the arms purchases by
accusing the United States of harboring "plans to invade
Venezuela." According to El Nacional, Chavez said the
re-armament of Venezuela was at "full sail" and purchases
included three Varshavyanka variant KIL0 class submarines,
six Amur variant KIL0 class submarines, 20 TOR-M1 air defense
systems (Ref. A), 10 surface ships, 20 patrol aircraft
(possibly the IL-114 available in maritime patrol, strike,
AWACS and SAR variants) and 10 Mi-28N HAVOC all-weather
attack helicopters (Ref B). The Venezuelan regional paper

Notitarde reported on July 15 that Venezuela would buy an undisclosed number of 2S25 SPRUT-SD light tanks.

¶5. (C) Comment: The steep learning curve associated with this new equipment means that, despite Chavez' promise of a warm welcome, Russians are likely to arrive as trainers and technicians, instead of combat troops. Izarra's quick clarification is yet another indicator of the BRV's sensitivity in an election year to accusations that Chavez is pursuing a radical foreign policy. End Comment.

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